

[The Bolshevik Revolution and our Socialist Opposition 1917 -2017](#)

[The Russian Revolution: A Soviet Bulletin of June 1917](#)

[The Origins Of Bolshevism](#)

[From Our Archives - The Russian Revolution](#)

[Bolshevism or Socialism? The SPGB On Leninism and the Legacy of 1917](#)

[From Our Archives - The Turmoil in Russia – WHERE WE STAND, AUGUST 1991](#)

Socialist Studies No 105, Autumn 2017

The Bolshevik Revolution and our Socialist Opposition 1917 -2017

When Lenin's small band placed themselves at the head of Petrograd protests, they came to power promising "*Peace, Land and Bread!*" They also promised "*All Power to the Soviets!*" In short, they deluded the hungry workers with promises they would not keep.

While Lenin and his clique proclaimed this was a Socialist revolution, the Socialist Party of Great Britain argued it could not be.

At first the Party's writers and speakers were hampered by lack of reliable information, as the media information in war-time was unreliable, biased by war-time censorship as well as the usual capitalist bias. Initially, the SPGB had welcomed these revolutionaries – they would at least take Russia's workers out of the WWI bloodbath!

But, even with limited information, it was clear that the essential preconditions for Socialism – an advanced, capitalist, class system and a class-conscious, wage-slave working class, democratically organised for the overthrow of the wages system and the establishment of Socialism: these simply could not and did not exist in war-torn Russia.

The first in-depth SPGB assessment was an article *The Revolution in Russia – Where it Fails* (SOCIALIST SYANDARD, August 1918). This raised the central issue: were these 166 million, mostly illiterate, peasants, wage-slaves and hunters, were they actually ready to establish social ownership of the means of production?

What evidence was there that Lenin's Bolshevik minority coup was supported by a class-conscious majority?

Unless a mental revolution has taken place such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has occurred immensely more rapidly than history has ever recorded, the answer is "No!"

Lenin had promised the peasants "*land*" but would they support common ownership? And would they provide "*bread*" for the starving cities?

The self-proclaimed "dictatorship of the proletariat" showed itself to be nothing of the sort. It was in fact simply a dictatorship of the ruling clique of the Bolsheviks.

That was the inevitable outcome of a coup where a minority seized power: as a minority it had to hold power by force, as a dictatorship. Either that or surrender the power to others.

This rule as a one-party dictatorship was actually what Lenin had aimed for. His theory of revolution was argued in

his 1902 book, *WHAT IS TO BE DONE?* In this he had echoed the ideas of P Tkatchev, who had argued for a conspiratorial vanguard party, led by professional revolutionaries, as the only way to overthrow autocratic Tsarism in backward Russia. This 'vanguard' was to lead the ignorant masses.

Even now this elitist, undemocratic vanguard party is held up as the model for all other revolutionaries to follow. The various Comintern-backed 'Communist' parties in many countries, including Britain, were all only too happy to follow this model. Likewise the umpteen varieties of Trotskyist sects which still plague the world. All portray themselves as the 'leaders' the working class needs.

But as Socialists have always argued, class-conscious intelligent workers do not need leaders – only sheep need leaders. Marx was emphatic on the need for the workers to organise themselves politically, e.g. in the Resolution of the 1871 London Conference on Working-class Political Action:

That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes.

MARX THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin, p.270

Lenin himself admitted that the system he was establishing was simply "state capitalism", and SPGB speakers infuriated the British Bolsheviks by quoting this. When Stalin announced "Socialism in one country", the SPGB showed, in RUSSIA: LAND OF HIGH PROFITS (Sept. 1930), that in 1920s 'Socialist' Russia (the NEP period), official Russian statistics showed high rates of profits. Foreign concession companies earned 81%-96% (1926-28), and the government paid investors high rates of interest, about 12%, on government loans.

All of these forms of investment, in the National Debt, in the co-operatives, and in the trading concerns, etc., are forms of exploitation of the Russian workers. They, like the workers everywhere, carry on their backs a class of property owners, receiving income from property ownership.

SOCIALIST STANDARD, reprinted in Russia Since 1917, SPGB pamphlet, 1948

In WWII the Western 'Communists', ruled and paid by Moscow, had to be supple. In the 1930s, the Left had opposed Fascist dictatorships. Then, when Stalin and Hitler signed a Non-Aggression Pact, the CPGB decided to oppose this evil 'imperialist' war. But in 1941, after Hitler invaded Russia, the CP was ordered to support the 'fight against Fascism'. So much for their 'internationalism'!

Lenin's lasting and most damaging legacy is that today most people assume that 'Socialism' means state capitalism with a dictatorial form of government. The "collapse of Communism" is widely accepted as shorthand for the failures of the Soviet Union as a state, and of state capitalism as an economic system.

Our opposition to the 'vanguard' form of revolutionary party has been shown right in many countries which have followed that model only to end up with a one-party corrupt dictatorship (China, North Korea, Zimbabwe etc.). A Socialist revolution can never be a 'top-down' affair – it has to be 'bottom-up', rooted in the class struggle and democratic, political, class consciousness.

Socialists in the SPGB still argue that Socialism has not failed – it has never yet been tried, anywhere.

This article is based on part of a lecture given in 1970 by Comrade Hardy. Comrade Cyril May was in the chair. Some of the transcript has been amended to remove repetitions and a few minor mistakes have been corrected.

WHERE IS RUSSIA GOING?

First let us look at the current economic reforms proposed by the Russian economist E. G Liberman ("Plans, Profits, Bonuses", in PLANNING, PROFIT AND INCENTIVES IN THE USSR, VOL 1. THE LIBERMAN DISCUSSION edited by Nyron E. Sharpe International, Arts and Science Press, 1966). The reforms have at their centre the use of profit as the only measurement for judging the performance of a state enterprise.

The Liberman reforms were necessary largely because of a decrease in productivity, shortages, and under-capacity.

There was a shift of power from the central planners to some 6000 industrial enterprises whose managers were allowed greater autonomy. There have been reports that one chemical factory has made 400 workers redundant.

The Liberman reforms have not finished. The implication of these reforms is that it will mean the power struggle between the Communist Party, the bureaucracy and the State managers will continue. The balance of power will be drawn away from the Communist Party since revolutionary zeal becomes less pronounced after time, like it did with the French Revolution. A new generation of Party leaders have different views and priorities to the early revolutionaries.

One final point and that is the pressure on Russia from being within a world of capitalist rivals, notably China and the US. A Russian economist has recently stated that a quarter of all Russian workers are working in the defence industry. That is an enormous burden on the economy. There are also the problems associated with the satellite countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Russia, then, will have to go on changing in the direction set out by the Liberman reforms.

[Back to top](#)

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: A SOVIET BULLETIN OF JUNE 1917

Sometime in 1917 the Socialist Party of Great Britain was sent from Stockholm the BULLETIN of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Workers and Soldiers Deputies, which has become known as the Petrograd Soviet. The Bulletin was a collection of a number of documents, published in English, by various groups within the Petrograd Soviet. The entire document is now published on-line on our website [www.socialiststudies.org.uk].

A keen philatelist in the Party had removed the postage stamp but on the back of the envelope is attached a sticker bearing the legend: “*opened by Censor 782*”. Under wartime regulations, all foreign post was routinely opened by British government censors.

The document’s historical importance is due to the fact that not many of these Bulletins now survive. The political importance of the Bulletin is that it contains articles and addresses from the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. Eventually, the Bolsheviks would later begin to ruthlessly squeeze out all other opposition groups from the Petrograd Soviet.

Readers of the Bulletin were told that the responsible editor was Karl Lindoff, then residing in Stockholm. The Bulletin was to be published ten times a month. The edition we received was Bulletin No. 1 for 26 June 1917. At this point, with the Kerensky Government still prosecuting the war, the Bolsheviks were thinking of attempting a coup.

Lindoff wrote: “*The purpose of our Bulletin is to help the public opinion of all countries to properly estimate the Russian Revolution*”.

And this is precisely what the Socialist Party of Great Britain did, albeit with only limited information at hand. For instance, in August 1918 the SOCIALIST STANDARD carried an important article *The Revolution in Russia: Where It Fails*, which argued:

Is this huge mass of people, numbering about 160,000,000 and spread over eight and a half millions of square miles, ready for Socialism? Are the hunters of the North, the struggling peasant proprietors of the south, the agricultural wage-slaves of the Central Provinces, and the industrial wage-slaves of the towns convinced of the necessity, and equipped with the knowledge requisite, for the establishment of the social ownership of the means of life?

Unless a mental revolution such as the world has never seen before has taken place, or an economic change has

The 1917 Russian Revolution actually started in late February. Triggered by the introduction of food rationing cards in Petrograd, it was launched by (mainly) women, infuriated by shortages and long queues for bread. When ordered to fire upon the protesters, the soldiers disobeyed. Along with massive protest demonstrations, there were mass strikes. Within days the Tsar had abdicated, and a '*Provisional*' government led by a former minister, Kerensky, took over.

But as the war dragged on, with increasing hardships for civilians, both in the cities and the countryside, the government lurched from crisis to crisis. By summer, peasants were taking over the estates of the landowners; long columns of soldiers were voting with their feet, making their way home; and, after a failed coup in early July, by October/November Lenin and Trotsky achieved another revolution.

The importance of the February revolution is the light it sheds on Lenin's spurious claim that a vanguard party with a centralised, top-down leadership was essential for leading the supine and ignorant masses. Lenin held that:

The working class by virtue of its own powers alone is capable solely of developing a trade union consciousness... class consciousness can only be brought to the workers from the outside, that is from outside the economic struggle, outside the sphere of the relations between workers and employers.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? 1901-2

Just weeks before the February rising, Lenin had stated in Switzerland that, as Russian workers were more backward and less revolutionary than any European workers, there was no chance of a revolution starting in Russia. But in Petrograd, at a time when the regime was weakened, workers and women could and did push at a rotten door.

Just then, Petrograd had very few members of the Bolshevik party (many were exiled or jailed). As one activist wrote: "*The revolution caught us, the party people of those days, like the foolish virgins of the Bible, napping.*" Another confirmed this: "*Absolutely no guiding initiative from the party centres was felt*" (quoted by Trotsky, THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, chapter 8, *Who led the February Revolution?*).

So the Bolshevik party, Lenin's revolutionary vanguard with its advanced theory, could not claim any credit for initiating or leading this movement, and the February revolution took them by surprise. In February 1917, the demonstrations and strikes seem to have been self-organised without the help of any useless leaders.

The women's demonstrations led to mass strikes, and the release of – mostly Menshevik – political prisoners. These established as a rival political authority the Petrograd Soviet (a workers' council), which at once started to arrange for food supplies. By November a popular slogan was "*All Power to the Soviets!*" but later, by June 1918, these councils were side-lined by the Bolsheviks.

A vanguard party could only result in top-down minority rule, and so dictatorship. But Socialism cannot be achieved that way: it requires a class-conscious majority, democratically and politically organised with a single objective. By ending the wages system, a Socialist working class can make Socialism possible.

FROM OUR ARCHIVES

Socialist Standard August 1937

MARXISM AND DICTATORSHIP

Only the peculiar conditions of Russia in 1914 at the outbreak of the European War... could have possibly given such a party as the Bolsheviks the chance of assuming the control of the government. However, the attempt to apply Socialist ideas and conditions in a country where the great mass of the people were ignorant of even the elementary principles on which modern Socialism is founded failed from its inception; as it was bound to do considering the miserably backward state of the country, both economically and politically. But once the Bolsheviks had gained

control in the midst of such conditions there seems little else that could have happened than the setting-up of a dictatorship if they were to maintain their hold upon the country irrespective of whether the people wanted it or not. But the important thing to notice is that their dictatorship had in reality nothing to do with Marx's theory of the working class coming to power to overthrow capitalist domination and establishing the Socialist form of society.

[Back to top](#)

THE ORIGINS OF BOLSHEVISM

Marx wrote that "*Men who boasted that they'd made a revolution have always seen the next day that the revolution made did not in the least resemble the one they would have liked to make*". Was this what happened to Lenin and the Bolsheviks? Was Bolshevik dictatorship intended and planned, or was it forced on them by circumstances?

From 1917 onwards, the world was force-fed a "Big Lie" – the lie that the Russian revolution had established 'Socialism', 'Communism', a 'workers' state', a 'Soviet Republic', and so on. We were supposed to believe that, under Lenin's inspired leadership, a tiny group of brilliant Bolsheviks had overthrown the Tsarist regime and established Socialism, and that workers in advanced countries must ape this minority coup.

Historians of the Left, even decades later, still proclaimed Lenin "*a genius*" (e.g. E H Carr; THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION 1917-1923, Penguin, 1950). The new doctrine of 'Marxism-Leninism' was widely embraced, and Lenin's ideas on political organisation were copied, especially in 'less developed' countries. The one-party state, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the 'cult of the individual' are still official dogma in so-called 'socialist states' like China and North Korea.

Hitler asserted that "*the broad mass of a nation will more easily fall victim to a big lie than a small one*" (MEIN KAMPF). Throughout the 20th century this Big Lie of 'Soviet communism' was echoed and broadcast, and used by generations of right-wing politicians as a scare tactic to drum up support for the apartheid regime in South Africa, to endorse McCarthyite witch-hunts in the US, and earlier to give support to Hitler and Fascism.

Just as nowadays, any radicals are likely to be labelled terrorists, for most of the 20th century such people and organisations were shunned as "*fellow-travellers*", "*Reds under the bed*" or "*the enemy within*" (in Thatcher's words).

Unasked questions

Why was it that Lenin, a man who had studied Marx, who knew Marx's arguments about the class struggle, and who had argued in January 1917 that the Russian workers were nowhere near ready for a revolution, yet within weeks of the February revolution was calling for an immediate uprising? Why did he insist on organising a 'vanguard party', to spearhead the masses, led by an elite group of 'professional revolutionaries', with a centralised leadership?

What was it about the Russian revolutionary tradition that made Lenin and many others so susceptible to ideas of opportunist adventurism? Just where did his theory of Bolshevism come from?

As the SPGB argued, from 1918 onwards if not earlier, such an organisation, if it succeeded in seizing power as a minority, could then only hold power as a dictatorship. This helps explain the one-party state, the centralised control of the media, the purges, the Tcheka and the Gulags, and the ruthless dictatorship of Lenin, Trotsky and, later, Stalin.

Yet this dictatorship, this minority coup, had nothing to do with Marx and Engels. From the start they had called for a *class struggle*, for class-conscious workers to *organise themselves in a political party* – not for a 'top-down' but a 'bottom-up' revolution. Marx and Engels were very doubtful of the ideas of those idealistic Russian radicals, the Narodniks, who argued that, with the Russian form of peasant commune (the *mir* or *obshchestvo*), the Russian peasants would be able to bypass capitalism, and leapfrog forward to a socialist or communist way of life.

As Marx wrote in 1877 in a letter to a Narodnik journal:

If Russia is tending to become a capitalist nation after the example of the Western European countries, and during the last years she has been taking a lot of trouble in this direction - she will not succeed without having first transformed a good part of the peasants into proletarians; and after that, once taken to the bosom of the capitalist regime, she will experience its pitiless laws like other profane peoples.

MARX AND ENGELS SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE, p353

Even so, in the next paragraph he pointed out that, whatever the general pattern to be seen in past developments, one should not assume the same path of development as a general law in countries with differing conditions.

Earlier, in a note to Engels about Flerovsky's book THE CONDITION OF THE WORKING CLASS IN RUSSIA (1869). Marx commented:

... [that] the present conditions in Russia can no longer be maintained, that the emancipation of the serfs [has] only, of course, hastened the process of disintegration and that a fearful social revolution is approaching. Here too one sees the real basis of the schoolboy nihilism which is at present the fashion among Russian students, etc.

12 February 1870, SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE, p286

Russia's would-be radicals

The Narodniks' naïve hopes that their 'going to the people' campaigns would inspire the peasants to rise up had proved a disappointment - the peasants at best ignored them, at worst reported them to the police. Generations of idealistic young people had gone from college to prison, exile and early death.

The origins of Bolshevism can be found in the Jacobin-inspired small conspiratorial circles of late 19th C Russia, isolated from each other by fear of the Tsarist secret police with its vast network of spies, double agents and informers.

The failure of the Narodnik movement led to a new, more extreme, trend. In the 1862 manifesto, *Young Russia*, Zaichnevsky wrote:

We will not be the pitiful revolutionaries of 1848, but rather the great terrorists of 1792... we will see that for the overthrowing of the contemporary social order it will prove necessary to expend twice as much blood as was expended by the Jacobins in the 1790s. [The revolutionary party] must take the dictatorship into its own hands and not stop at anything. Elections... must take place under the surveillance of the (revolutionary) government which will at once make sure that no partisans of the old order - that is, if they are still alive - make up the components of this new assembly.

See Albert L Weeks THE FIRST BOLSHEVIK, New York 1968, pp29-30

A similar line was taken by Speshnev, influenced by the 1840s French radicals, who promoted as a blueprint for a Russian revolution:

- * Centralised leadership with a central committee;
- * Conspiratorial organisation;
- * Establishment of a post-revolutionary dictatorship;
- * Collectivism of Russian agriculture.

Ibid. p28

Nechayev's chilling 'nihilist' manifesto THE REVOLUTIONARY CATECHISM (1868-69) outlined what was required of a real revolutionary:

He is mercilessly hostile to society; he continues to live in society only so that he may eventually destroy it... He

despises public opinion, all the pretensions of contemporary morality. Everything that glorifies revolution is moral to him; everything that interferes with it is immoral and unjust.... He who feels pity for anything in this society is not a revolutionary.

Ibid., p48

Nechayev was however a very dubious, untrustworthy character, given to wildly exaggerating his revolutionary credentials, and unscrupulously deceiving and taking advantage of others.

A more important influence for Lenin was Tkachev (1844-1886) with his journal NABAT (THE ALARM), launched in 1875. Nabat was available among the many pamphlets and manifestos collected by an exiled radical, Bonch-Bruyevich, and made available to Lenin. In Switzerland Lenin urged his supporters to study the “*magnificent*” Tkachev. As a Russian historian Mitskevich wrote, in 1923 in a Soviet journal:

It is an irrefutable fact that the Russian Revolution proceeded to a significant degree according to the ideas of Tkachev, with the seizure of power made at a time determined in advance by a revolutionary party which was organised on the principle of strict centralisation and discipline.

Ibid. pvi - note

Western historians like Leonard Schapiro also noted Tkachev’s pioneering “*ideology for revolutionary activity*”:

P N Tkachev was the first Russian to teach that the revolution should be made by a small conspiratorial body of professionals, acting in the name of the people. According to Tkachev the revolutionary minority, or party, must first seize political power, and then transform society...

The resemblance to bolshevism, such as it was eventually to become, is in some respects very striking, and it is with justice that Tkachev has often been described as the originator of many of Lenin’s ideas. Lenin himself would later closely study Tkachev, and insist on Tkachev’s articles as required reading for his own followers. In contrast, Engels was very critical of his views, and [in 1875] engaged in open polemics with him.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION., Methuen, 1970, p4

The Bolshevik / Tkachev formula

The central idea was to organise for a top-down vanguardist political revolution leading to a dictatorship. With the failure of the Narodniks’ efforts to rouse the peasants and workers, Tkachev took a new line:

If you leave the people to themselves, they will build nothing new. They will only spread the old way of life to which they have become accustomed... A revolutionary minority is no longer willing to wait but must take upon itself the forcing of consciousness upon the people... The [intellectual] minority will impart a considered and rational form to the struggle... directing this coarse material [the masses] towards ideal principles...
see Weeks, pp75-77

Like Lenin later, Tkachev emphasised the need for an organised revolutionary movement:

The success of revolution depends on the formation and organised unity of scattered revolutionary elements into a living organism which is able to act according to a single, common plan, and be subordinated to a single, common leadership...
see Weeks, p86

Tkachev’s ideas were echoed almost word for word, in Lenin’s WHAT IS TO BE DONE? (1901-2). Even now, in the West, you can still find latter-day Leninists and Trotskyists in universities and Leftwing groups spouting this arrogant elitism, declaring themselves the self-appointed intellectual elite.

Was Lenin really a “genius”?

The consensus among historians of the Russian revolution and others on the ‘Left’ was that Lenin was a great man and a genius.

But surely a genius should show some originality in his thinking? Yet even in the titles of his works, Lenin borrowed from others, e.g.:

- * WHAT IS TO BE DONE? – this title was taken from the novel of the same name by Chernyshevsky;
- * ISKRA (the Spark) – this was the title of an earlier journal, referring back to Herzen’s quote, in THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE AND SOCIALISM, from a French poet;
- * THE STATE AND REVOLUTION - this title was similar to Tkachev’s REVOLUTION AND THE STATE (1876).

In short Lenin took his organisational ideas and his vanguard theory from Tkachev, his Machiavellian tactics and ‘nihilism’ from Speshnev and Nechayev, and his book titles from - anyone.

Class struggle, the masses and the February revolution

Above all Lenin is credited with being the originator of the vanguard theory of revolution, along with his insistence on a centralised leadership.

However Marx’s views on revolution were very different. Marx always argued for the *class struggle* as the driver of revolution. This meant a class-conscious working class, conscious of its interests as a class “*in and for itself*”, and so able to organise itself, economically and politically. He argued for a political class struggle, first in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, and much later repeatedly urged workers to organise themselves as a political party (e.g. *Resolution of the London Conference on Political Action*, 1871, DOCUMENTS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL - THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin 1974, p270).

Lenin however argued: that “*the workers by themselves could not get beyond a mere trade union consciousness*” (WHAT IS TO BE DONE?). In saying this he was disregarding many instances of workers having organised themselves for political change – the Chartists, the Paris Commune, etc. Even in Russia, there had emerged small movements of workers with declared socialist aims.

The facts about the February 1917 revolution are enough to make one question Lenin’s vanguard theory. In a very few days, food riots and mass protests at the meagre war-time rations resulted in the Tsar’s abdication. In his book, THE HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION (1930), Trotsky asked pointedly: “*Who Led the February Insurrection?*” (vol. 1. Chap.8).

As most of the Bolshevik leadership was then either abroad or in jail, or miles away in Siberian exile, this movement was clearly not organised by them, and not led by professional revolutionaries or party members. Trotsky was in New York and did not get to Russia till May. Just a few weeks before the February rising, Lenin made a speech to Swiss workers in which he declared emphatically it was most unlikely there would be a revolution in Russia in his lifetime.

As Trotsky saw it the February rising was not ‘spontaneous’ – just leaderless, with a politicised working class, resentful of meagre rations, hardships, and crass inequality. During war-time, the landowners lacked military garrisons to protect them from peasants. Faced with the February rising, the Tsar’s usual reaction was to call out the Guards. But this time the Guards refused to fire on the people.

The success of the rising – in getting rid of the Tsarist autocracy – was obvious. The war and a series of military defeats had weakened the Tsarist regime.

It was unable to rely on its armies to crush the demonstrators or, in the summer, to protect landowners’ houses from being destroyed by mobs of angry peasants. When push came to shove, the Russian revolutions of 1917 were as easy as “*kicking in a rotten door*”.

The fact is these 1917 revolutions did not depend on the inspired leadership of a small group of out-of-touch, elitist, theorists of revolution.

And that Lenin was out of touch is clear. On arriving in Petersburg, his speech (the *April Theses*) so shocked his own party that some discussed expelling him. Later he badgered them into an attempted coup in July. This failed and he was forced into exile, in Finland. Through the summer and autumn, he shilly-shallied on tactics – whether to be a pacifist or back the war, whether to form an alliance with the peasants' party, the SRs, whether to back the Constituent Assembly or break it up, etc.

But it was one thing for Lenin's autumn coup to succeed in conditions of months of political instability, with the soldiers “*voting with their feet*” as they walked away from the battlefields, with the peasants seizing land, and the city workers in angry protests. His expectation was that workers in other states – Germany, France, Britain etc - were on the brink of revolution, in which case the Russian revolt would light a spark, triggering other revolutions. In relying on this, he was again mistaken.

Like Nechayev he was single-minded in his urging of revolution at all costs, whatever the odds. Like Tkachev he insisted on his party following his orders. The ‘party line’ had to be followed or expulsion followed.

By seizing political power without the active support of the majority of the working class, the Bolshevik minority was inevitably only going to be able to hold power as a dictatorship. And this was the planned and foreseeable outcome of the Bolshevik and Tkachev recipe for a minority revolution, a Jacobin or Blanquist coup d'etat, one which could only lead to a dictatorship, not to a social revolution.

But this dictatorship has nothing to do with a Socialist revolution, based on the class struggle and a working-class organising itself as a class-conscious political party, for its self-emancipation.

For this no leadership is needed, no self-appointed elitist vanguard. Just a clear-headed understanding of how workers are exploited under capitalism, and a level-headed democratic political organisation to bring about a real change, and an end to the class system.

[Back to top](#)

FROM OUR ARCHIVES* *THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

[From The Socialist Party of Great Britain's pamphlet QUESTIONS OF THE DAY, 1932]

During the past fourteen years the socialist movement throughout the world has been challenged to re-examine its theories and actions in the light of the Russian so-called “*Dictatorship of the Proletariat*”. It is worthwhile considering what the Bolsheviks have achieved and what their experience can teach us.

Russia before the war was a country of big but inefficiently farmed landed estates, side by side with millions of peasants impoverished by the high rents they had to pay to the landlords, and a growing population of industrial workers. Capitalist industry had made great strides (largely by the investment of foreign capital) and railways had been built bringing Russian grain to the outside world. Further development was hindered by the lack of a home market where the industrial products could be sold. Apart from a minority of capitalist farmers and landlords, the rural population (peasants and labourers) were too poor to buy industrial products in large quantities. Discontent was rife among the peasants, and the prolonged industrial depression and consequent unemployment in the towns during the early years of the Twentieth Century, provided the material for working-class trade union and political

organisation. On top of this, the majority of the capitalists were also strongly opposed to the Tsarist regime, because its repressive methods and undemocratic structure were out of keeping with the needs of capitalist industry and commerce.

The Russian Social Democratic Party was divided into two sections which ultimately became separate parties – the “*Mensheviks*” (a word meaning “*Minority*”) and the “*Bolsheviks*” (meaning “*Majority*”). The Mensheviks believed that Russia must pass through the normal stage of capitalist development and democratic government. The Bolsheviks urged the need for illegal organisation and activities, and as early as 1905 believed that the conquest of power in Russia might precede and inspire revolution in the advanced countries of Western Europe. (See AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION, translated from official Russian sources and published by Martin Lawrence, Ltd., London, 1928. Vol. 1. p31). Both sections of the Party put forward programmes of reforms.

The basis of the Bolshevik illegal organisation in the years before the War was the three “*fundamental*” slogans: a democratic republic; expropriation of the landowners; and the eight-hour day.

Both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks believed in seeking seats in Parliament and were, in fact, represented in the “*Dumas*” which the Tsar called as a promised step towards representative government.

When Russia entered the War in 1914, the Bolsheviks opposed it and voted against war credits. They strongly condemned all the so-called socialists who supported the War on the one side or the other, and, indeed, they solicited the assistance of the Socialist Party of Great Britain to gain publicity in England for their manifesto protesting against this treacherous conduct (see SOCIALIST STANDARD, March 1915.)

After years of defeat at the front, Russia came to the stage where a continuance of the War became impossible. The backward industrial development of the country put it beyond her powers to conduct warfare in conflict with a highly industrialised power like Germany on the enormous scale of the 20th century. Another factor was pro-German influences at the Russian Court.

The hardships imposed both on the civilian population and on the troops through inadequate transport, defective equipment, scarcity of food, and high prices, together with the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling class, brought about conditions of revolt. There were constant strikes in the large towns, not only for higher wages, but also for peace. There were mutinies of troops at the front. Soldiers brought out against the workers at home openly sided with them. Crowds attacked the houses of Tsarist Ministers.

In this situation the Tsar, on March 11th 1917, ordered the dissolution of the Duma but the Duma decided to carry on (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, Vol. II, p566.). After the revolt of a number of regiments and a few days of confused fighting in the streets, the Tsar abdicated on March 15th 1917 (dates according to the English calendar).

A Provisional Government was formed by the Liberals and other capitalists and landowners’ representatives in the Duma, together with Kerensky, who, as Minister of Justice, was supposed to represent the workers and peasants. (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, Vol. I, pp86, 98.) At the same time Councils of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers (“*Soviets*”) were being formed. The Provisional Government was Monarchist, although convinced that the Tsar must go, and was in favour of continuing the War. At first the Soviets were largely controlled by delegates hostile to the Bolsheviks and they gave general support to the openly capitalist Provisional Government.

Kerensky, Minister of Justice in the Provisional Government, was Vice-President of the Soviet and was the connecting link between the Soviet and the committee of the Duma, the two bodies by which the Provisional Government was organised (see LEAVES FROM A RUSSIAN DIARY by Pitirim Sorokin, Kerensky’s Secretary, published by Hurst & Blackett, London p21.) The Soviet of Workmen and Soldiers had, from the first, established the right to hold its sittings in the Hall of the Duma, where the Duma Committee also met (Sorokin, pp17 and 53).

In May 1917, the Government became a coalition, in which the avowedly capitalist parties had a majority (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, vol. I, p152). Then in July Kerensky became head of a Government containing a majority of so-called socialists and supported by the Soviets. The fact that the Kerensky Government had the backing

of the Soviets was of decisive importance. Because of that the Bolsheviks were for the time being unable to make headway against the Government. The position was entirely changed later on when the Bolsheviks obtained control of the Soviets but until then the Soviets were used to suppress Bolshevik activities.

For example, in June 1917, the Bolshevik minority called for an armed demonstration of soldiers and workmen with the slogan, “*Down with the Capitalistic Government! Down with the War! All Power to the Soviets!*” A counter-proclamation, appealing to soldiers and workmen to abstain, was issued jointly by the Peasants’ Soviet and the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Soviet (Sorokin, p54). The latter appeal was successful and the Bolsheviks called off their demonstration.

It was on the motion of Mensheviks that a Joint Conference of the two Soviets (July 3rd-5th 1917) passed a resolution recognising the supreme authority of the Soviet, and denying membership to those who would repudiate it or try to overthrow it (Sorokin, p63). Troops, recalled from the front to suppress a Bolshevik armed rising, acted with the support of the Soviets. They were claimed to be protecting “*the Government and the Soviet*” against the Bolshevik minority (Sorokin, p70). Later, when the Government had to deal with straight factual the revolt of Kornilov and his military supporters it was to the Soviets that Kerensky turned for help (Sorokin, p87).

During this period, with the War dragging on and with the hardships aggravated by former army officers attempting to seize power, the Bolshevik Party, in spite of the persecution by the Kerensky Government, was carrying on active propaganda in favour of peace, the giving of land to the peasants, etc.

At first the Bolsheviks had demanded the calling of a democratically-elected Constituent Assembly to decide on the future constitution of Russia. Then, in April 1917, they were popularising the slogan “*All Power to the Soviets*”, although at that time this would have meant power falling into the hands of the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who had a majority on the Soviets (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, vol. II, p203). In July the Bolsheviks, believing that there was no longer a chance of splitting these groups from the openly capitalist parties, abandoned their slogan “*All Power to the Soviets*”, only to revive it again two months later (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY, pp.303 and 304). In September 1917, they were even prepared to support a Menshevik and Social Revolutionary Government responsible to the Soviets, on the condition (in the words of Lenin) of “*absolute liberty of agitation and the calling of the Constituent Assembly at the date fixed, or even within a shorter period*”. This offer came to nothing.

In the meantime, owing to the general discontent, Bolshevik propaganda made continual headway. The whole political situation was transformed when they managed to get the support of a majority of the Soviet delegates, thus coming into possession of the most representative political machinery of Russia at the time.

On September 9th a Bolshevik was elected President of the Kronstadt Soviet. On October 1st the Moscow Soviet elected a Bolshevik majority. On October 8th Trotsky was elected President of the Petrograd Soviet, which on October 15th demanded the transfer of all power to the Soviets and the conclusion of an immediate peace. During October there were seizures of land by the peasants all over Russia. On October 22nd the Petrograd Soviet formed a military Revolutionary Committee to control the “*Red Guards*” of soldiers and armed workers. Faced with this new situation the central Committee of the Bolshevik Party on October 23rd accepted a resolution moved by Lenin in favour of armed insurrection.

The All-Russian Soviet Congress was arranged to meet on November 7th 1917. On that day the Petrograd Soviet (with a Bolshevik majority) declared in favour of the overthrow of the Government. At the All-Russian Soviet Congress there was 670 delegates, of whom 390 (a clear majority) were Bolsheviks and 179 were Left Social Revolutionaries who, in the main, supported the Bolsheviks.

The Congress passed resolutions moved by Lenin in favour of peace, the abolition of landowners’ right to possession of the land, and the setting up of a “*temporary*” workers’ and peasants’ government pending the summoning of a Constituent Assembly (p442).

The Soviet Congress approved the “*victorious insurrection of the workers and the garrison of Petrograd*” and declared that “*the Congress takes all power into its hand.*” (p.431).

On November 9th a victorious rising took place in Moscow, inspired by the events in Petrograd. The Bolsheviks, within a comparatively short space of time, consolidated their position, based upon the support of majorities in the Soviets.

The significance of these episodes of Russian history in 1917 is the one Marx so constantly stressed, viz. the need to gain control of the political machinery. The Bolsheviks were enabled to do this through controlling the Soviets. (The Duma, elected on a limited franchise, which excluded most of the workers and peasants, was less representative and less popular than the Soviets, and had accordingly fallen into the background soon after the overthrow of the Tsar.)

Trotsky brought out this point well in his *THE LESSONS OF OCTOBER, 1917* (Labour Publishing Co. Ltd., London, 1925). Writing of the struggle during 1917 between the Bolshevik minority and the Kerensky Government, he says:

The struggle between us and the compromisers centred around the constitutional position of the Soviets. In the minds of the people the Soviets were the source of all the power. Kerensky, Tseretelli, and Skobelev came from the Soviets. But we, too, were closely connected with the Soviets, for our cry was "All Power to the Soviets". The Bourgeoisie considered that they inherited their rights from the State Duma. The compromisers inherited theirs from the Soviets, and so did we; but they wanted to get rid of the Soviets, and we wanted to transfer all power to the Soviets. The compromisers could not yet break the Soviets, so they tried to make a bridge, as quickly as they could, from them to a Parliamentary system. And this was why they convened the democratic Conference and created a Preliminary Parliament...

But it was in our interest, too, to take advantage of the constitutional position of the Soviets. At the end of the democratic Conference we forced the compromisers to agree to convene the Second Congress of Soviets. Convening the congress embarrassed them very much; they could not oppose it, because then they would have given up the constitutional position of the Soviets; yet they could not help seeing this Congress – on account of the way it was composed – promised them very little good.

... It was one thing to make an armed insurrection under the mere naked cry of seizing power for the party, and quite another thing to prepare an insurrection – and carry it out – under the cry of protecting the rights of the Congress of Soviets (pp.63 and 64).

With regard to the peculiar position of Russia, a backward country overwhelmed by the strain of war, Trotsky says:

The first necessity was an army that did not want to fight. The whole course of the revolution would have been changed, if at the moment of the revolution there had been a broken and discontented peasant army of many millions, and this applies specially to the period from February to October... It is only because of this that the experiment with the Petrograd garrison was successful; and that experiment determined the October victory (pp 67 and 68).

The "experiment" referred to by Trotsky was a decision of the Petrograd Soviet in September 1917, opposing the removal from Petrograd of troops garrisoned there. This was, says Trotsky:

... really an armed resurrection... armed though bloodless... an insurrection of the Petrograd regiments against the provisional government... under the cry of defending and protecting the Second Congress of Soviets (p61).

Trotsky described this as an "almost constitutional armed insurrection":

We call this insurrection "Constitutional" because it grew from the "normal" relations of the existing division of power. It happened more than once, even when the compromisers were in power, in the Petrograd Soviet, that the Soviet examined or amended decisions of the Government. This was, as it were, part of the constitution under the regime named after Kerensky. When the Bolsheviks got an upper hand in the Petrograd Soviet we only went along with the system of double power and widened its application. We took it on ourselves to revise the order sending the troops to the front, and so we disguised the actual fact of the insurrection of the Petrograd garrison under the

It only remains to add that, when the Constituent Assembly met on 5th January 1918, a body which the Bolsheviks had themselves demanded, they promptly dissolved it on finding that a majority of its delegates were opposed to them. (ILLUSTRATED HISTORY Vol. II, p494).

Having been voted into power on their programme of “*Peace, Bread and Land*,” by peasants and workers who wanted these things but who in the overwhelming majority knew nothing of Socialism and cared less, the Bolshevik Government was then faced with the problem of using dictatorship to establish Socialism. We will now see how they fared in this, their main purpose.

The Work of the Bolshevik Government

The Bolsheviks kept their pledge to confirm the peasant seizure of the land and to stop the war. They dealt energetically with one after another of the attempts, fostered by foreign governments, to overthrow them. They unified Russia. They tackled the 1921 famine. Then when their political opposition was so firmly established that attacks upon them ceased they set about their attempt to apply their theories to industry and agriculture. Their great and unsolved problem has been one which arises from the condition of Russia and of its people, that the peasants – the great majority of the population – did not and do not stand for or want Socialism. They wanted the land, indeed they were fast taking it before the Bolsheviks obtained control. A large majority of the town workers also were and still are lacking in an understanding of Socialism.

Every step by the Bolshevik Party that has ignored these conditions has been brought sharply up against the solid opposition of the non-socialist majority.

It is in order to emphasise a very important lesson, and in no spirit of belittling the Bolsheviks for what they have done or what they aimed at doing, that we have insisted from the first that it was impossible for them to institute Socialism in Russia.

Every new development – from the New Economic Policy of 1921 to the Five Year Plan of 1928 – has served to demonstrate the inescapable truth of our case. Russian industry and agriculture have developed and are developing rapidly under the Bolshevik Government but the growth is not the growth of Socialism to which the Communists have looked forward but the growth – on lines suitable to Russia and to the 20th century – of a great capitalist power, a formidable competitor to other capitalist powers in the markets of the world.

In the years 1917-1921 the Communists talked of a quick transition to Socialism. Now – fifteen years later – they are still promising Socialism, but not immediately. Now it is only to be after the second Five-Year Plan! But none of the chief characteristics of capitalism have disappeared or ever were in the process of disappearing.

Goods are not produced for use but for sale, to those who had the money to buy, as in other capitalist countries. The workers are not members of a social system in which the means of wealth production are socially owned and controlled but are wage-earners in the employ of the state capitalist concerns, semi-state concerns, and private companies. Russia differs from other countries in the fact that the state and semi-state concerns greatly outnumber the purely private concerns.

But that difference is not fundamental; it is only one of form. The Russian state concerns are no more “socially owned” than is the British Post Office or the Central Electricity Board, or any private company. In both countries these enterprises are forms of investment for large and small capitalists, although in Russia where Capitalism is fully undeveloped the investors are so far in the main small investors.

The Russian Government estimated that it would borrow in all £600 million in order to finance the first Five year Plan. These figures, which were published in an official Russian publication “*The Bank for Russian Trade Review*” (London, June 1929), have in fact even been exceeded. In 1931 and 1932 alone the estimate provided for the borrowing of £158 million and £275 million (“Review”, January 1932). This money has been raised almost entirely

inside Russia, the investors receiving interest at relatively high rates – 8 per cent., 9 per cent., 10 per cent., or more. In the Budget for 1932, the “Expenses on State loans” figure at £100 million (“Review”, January 1932).

In addition, the Russian Government has secured commercial credits abroad to the amount of £200 million or more, while inside the country there are the foreign Concession Companies which make big profits but are small in total capital as compared with the State concerns. The feature of profit-making extends likewise to the Russian Co-operative concerns and to the Government farms. The rich and poor peasants who enter the collective farms receive interest on the amount of capital they provide in the shape of land and equipment, cattle, etc. By recent decrees individual peasants inside and outside the collective farms are allowed to sell their grain, meat and livestock at ordinary market prices after they have sold fixed quantities, at fixed prices to the State (*Bulletin of the Anglo-Russian Parliamentary Committee*, May 26th 1932).

In the factories, objectionable methods of stimulating output (piece rates, premium bonuses, etc.) have been copied from Europe and America. How else could Russia hope to compete on the world markets? Great inequality of income exists between the different grades of factory workers, civil servants, technicians and administrative officials. This tendency is for this inequality to increase.

As part of the First Five Year Plan, Russian imports and exports were both to be increased enormously. The planned imports in 1932-33 (in pre-war prices) were to be 25 per cent. greater than in 1913, and the exports about 32 per cent. greater (see SOVIET UNION YEAR BOOK, 1929, p291).

The REVIEW OF THE BANK FOR RUSSIAN TRADE (London, August 1931) says:-

It is not the aim of the Soviet authorities to make the U.S.S.R. self-sufficient. On the contrary, it is their full intention to utilise all the advantages of the international division of labour and international technical co-operation.

This means that Russia will become more and more closely bound up with the conditions of world trade. Indeed the depression of 1931, by depressing the prices at which Russian exports could be sold, seriously deranged the production plans and upset the anticipated exports and imports.

The Bolsheviks are carrying on the task of adjusting Russian agriculture and industry to the needs of the capitalist market at home and abroad, which was begun under the Tsar’s Government before the War. Owing to the expansion of Russian Capitalism and to the protective measures of the Bolshevik Government, the standard of living of the Russian workers has been raised above the pre-war level, and working conditions have been improved, but it is not for that that the Bolsheviks and their supporters abroad claim justification for the Dictatorship.

The Dictatorship – a Dictatorship of a ruling clique, not of the working class – was to be judged by its usefulness in bringing about Socialism. Judged by that standard it fails.

The Russian workers have been urged to accept poor conditions because of the promise of a bright future when the Five-Year Plan, or its successor, produces Socialism. The truth is that Russia will not have Socialism until Capitalism has first developed and until the workers in Russia and in the advanced capitalist nations have reached the point of understanding it and being prepared to take political action consciously for that purpose. Trotsky has recently admitted that: “*European Capitalism is far nearer to a Socialist revolution than the Soviet Union is to a National Socialist Society.*” (THE MILITANT, New York, March 12th 1932).

The tragic side of the Russian experiment is the effect upon the workers and upon the Bolsheviks themselves. Faced with the many and difficult economic and political problems inseparable both from Dictatorship and from the administration of a backward capitalist country, they have had to use violent means in order to retain power. In order to justify their actions they have described “*State Capitalism*” as “*Socialism*”. Instead of teaching the principles of Socialism and showing the workers what must yet be done before they can introduce social ownership of the means of production and distribution, the Bolshevik Government and Party have emulated the Labour leaders in Western Europe, who describe Nationalisation and Public Utility Corporations as Socialism.

They have had to introduce the customary capitalist methods of stimulating output by the use of bonuses, etc. but in

addition, they have descended to the shameful practice of disguising the objectionable nature of these by calling them “*Socialist competition*”. Unable – like all the “*Labour*” Governments elected on a reform programme – to eradicate the class conflict inherent in the capitalist system, they have been faced with constant propaganda or forcible opposition, and have dealt with it like other Governments of capitalist States by resorting to imprisonment, suppression, exile and death. A socialist movement will grow in Russia, but it will come from the workers, not from the Russian dictators. The revolutionary fervour, as in past revolutions, has a tendency to work itself out as time goes on. The revolutionisers of the beginning are followed by waves of more and more reactionary successors.

Neither in their views, nor in their belief – now rapidly losing the hold it at first gained abroad – about the possibility of imposing Socialism by dictatorship, have the Bolsheviks added anything to the knowledge possessed by Marx. Marx’s words, from the 1867 preface to the First Edition of Volume I of *CAPITAL*, still remain unchallengeable:

One nation can and should learn from others. And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural laws of its movement... It can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs (Swan Sonnenschein Edition, p. xix.).

The Bolshevik attempt to usher in Socialism by “*legal enactments*” and by “*bold leaps*”, before the economic conditions were ripe and before the mass of the population desired socialism, has been a total failure. In course of time that failure will become obvious to the workers inside and outside Russia.

FROM OUR ARCHIVES
SOCIALIST STANDARD, March 1937

THE MYSTERY OF THE TRIALS

Socialists are far from being surprised at these developments. On the contrary, it was obvious from the outset that the dictatorship of a small party over a largely apathetic or hostile population was bound eventually to degenerate in just the way that it has. The terrorism glorified as an instrument of policy by Lenin and Trotsky has been turned by Stalin against some of his former associates and potential rivals. Short of abandoning the party dictatorship what else could have happened?

[Back to top](#)

BOLSHEVISM OR SOCIALISM? THE SPGB ON LENINISM AND THE LEGACY OF 1917

From 1917 on, Socialists and Marxists have been dogged by the propaganda after-effects of the Russian Revolution. The SPGB’s public speakers were regularly accused of being Bolsheviks and told to go back to Russia. After 1945 with the Cold War and, more recently, after the so-called ‘*collapse of communism*’, when many people from Eastern Europe migrated to the West, this ignorant abuse has worsened. It is now widely held that Socialism / Communism has been tried and shown to fail, catastrophically. The mass media use their bully-pulpit to megaphone the lying message that Marxism means monstrous dictatorship. We Socialists can spend a lifetime arguing the contrary yet still our message is heard by only too few.

Yet the fact is that, within months of the Russian Revolution, the SPGB argued that, whatever system Lenin and his clique could install in Russia, it would not be Socialism. From the start it was clear that this Bolshevik coup was the work of an elitist minority, and could not have the class-conscious backing of the vast majority of Russia’s mostly illiterate workers and peasants. They may have wanted rid of the Tsars and the war but that did not mean they wanted Socialism.

Lenin's opportunistic Bolsheviks used borrowed slogans from the peasants' party and others: one day it was "Peace! Land! Bread!", another day it was "All Power to the Soviets!" But Socialism - *i.e. the common ownership* of the land and other means of production - was not proclaimed as the Bolsheviks' aim. That would have brought them into conflict with the peasants, who were focussed on their land-grab of summer 1917.

For Lenin and his tiny band of 'professional revolutionaries', to hold power as a minority meant they would have to act as a dictatorship. Just a few weeks after the Revolution, long before Stalin came to power and expanded the use of a vast slave-labour gulags and ruthless purges, Lenin had set up the Cheka. This was the predecessor of the KGB and the NKVD, etc: successors to the feared Tsarist Okhrana.

In the short document signed by Lenin / Ulyanov, on 20 December 1917, this Cheka (short for Extraordinary Commission) was to cover information / spying, organising against 'counter-terrorism' / repression, and "*the fighting section*":

The Commission shall keep an eye on the press, saboteurs, right Socialist Revolutionaries and strikers. Measures to be taken are confiscation, imprisonment, confiscation of cards, publication of the names of the enemies of the people, etc.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND THE SOVIET STATE 1917-1921 Documents
ed. Martin McCauley, 1975, pp181-182

The Bolsheviks were so proud of that innovation that this document remained secret for 10 years until it was published in Pravda (18 December 1927). The early date of that original founding document tells us that the Bolshevik system of repressive dictatorship was not a defensive reaction to organised opposition or to the civil war. It pre-dated any appearance of real opposition or of Western armed intervention. Nor can it be blamed with hindsight on Stalin's "excesses": it was a part of Lenin's Jacobin idea of revolution.

And that went utterly counter to Marx's argument that:

... to conquer political power is the great duty of the working classes... What was new in the International was that it was established by the working men themselves and for themselves.

DOCUMENTS OF THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL 1871-2, MARX: THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND AFTER, Penguin, 1974, pp269-271

There was some evidence that Lenin had pinned his hopes on a Russian coup acting as a spark to ignite revolutions in other countries. He was mistaken in his expectations: workers' Social Democratic parties had been lured into reformism, and had supported the war, so were unlikely to mobilise for a revolution.

The claim made that this was a "Socialist Revolution" was soon refuted by Lenin himself, in his pamphlet *The Chief Tasks of our Times*, quoted in our journal the SOCIALIST STUDIES(July 1920):

Here, Lenin stated that what he was trying to establish in backward Russia was not Socialism but State Capitalism:

Reality says that State Capitalism would be a step forward for us; if we were able to bring about State Capitalism in a short time it would be a victory for us... To bring about State Capitalism at the present time means to establish the control and order formerly achieved by the propertied classes. We have in Germany an example of State Capitalism, and we know she proved our superior.... If we possessed it in Russia the transition to complete Socialism would be easy, because State Socialism [sic] is centralisation, control, socialisation – in fact, everything we lack.

Quoted in *A Socialist View of Bolshevik Policy*, July 1920,
see RUSSIA SINCE 1917, SPGB pamphlet 1948, p 20

In that passage Lenin slipped easily from writing about State Capitalism to writing of 'State Socialism'! This showed him unable to grasp the basic difference between Socialism and capitalism, *i.e.* the existence of the wages system, an exploited wage-slave class and production for profit, with the class system defended by the state. In Socialism, a classless society, there would be no need for a state.

Lenin argued that for backward Russia state capitalism was essential:

Socialism can only be reached by the development of State Capitalism, the careful organisation of finance, control and discipline among the workers. Without this there is no Socialism.

To which the SPGB replied:

If we are to copy Bolshevik policy in other countries we should have to demand State Capitalism, which is not a step to Socialism in advanced countries... That Socialism can only be reached through State Capitalism is untrue. Socialism depends upon large-scale production, whether organised by Trusts or Governments. State Capitalism may be the method used in Russia, but only because the Bolshevik Government find their theories of doing without capitalist development unworkable – hence they are forced to retreat along the capitalist road (ibid.).

Now, a century later, the Bolshevik model, a one-party dictatorship with large-scale nationalisation, has become widely adopted as a model for capitalist development in many backward countries.

Lenin's legacy is still seen today in the dictatorships of China and North Korea, in Cuba, and many African and Asian countries. Like the Soviet regime, phony elections are held endorsing the ruler's continued power, and the media are muzzled.

Along with dictatorship came another evil – corruption, an old Russian tradition. Even as early as 1920-21, with the cities starving and the railways at breaking point, Lenin was shamelessly using his position of power and privilege to arrange favours for friends and family. His wife's nephew – a job in the Red Army; his friend Cde Markov - a flat and the use of a car; his sister and others, going to the Crimea: "*they have a special coach. Could you not give orders that... this coach should be attached to military trains in order to speed it up?...*". And so on (Martin McCauley, op cit., pp 196-7).

In a one-party state with complete state control of the media, and systematic terrorising of the population, the ruling party elite are bound to be corrupted. Long before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991, there was systematic corruption at all levels of the CPSU, even among the Komsomol, its youth wing, where the only motive for involvement was in the hope of having a bit of "pull" ("blat"): help in getting a flat or a taxi license, or in furthering a career. Well before it was formally dissolved, the Party – the CPSU - had become simply a network of influence-peddling and self-interest, and had long since ceased to rely on any ideological loyalty.

Now, long after the end of the 'Soviet' system, Putin and Medvedev and their circle are setting new records for corruption and 'kleptocracy'. With the post-Stalin era, when the Party no longer relied on terror and purges, it degraded into something more like a western-style Mafia, with its protection rackets, than a 'revolutionary' organisation. Later, post-Yeltsin, it morphed into a quasi-criminal oligarchy.

Lenin's 'Genius'

Lenin's revolution had demanded "*All Power to the Soviets*". His Western apologists claimed that the 'Soviet' was Lenin's major revolutionary invention, the unique key to establishing Socialism elsewhere. Yet 'soviet' had existed in Russia before 1917 – the word 'soviet' simply means a council.

What the Bolsheviks did was to set up anti-war groups among war-weary army and navy conscripts, hungry miners and industrial workers, and anywhere else where people were unhappy with war-time austerity. They ensured that everywhere it was *their* people who led these new 'soviet's'.

The Bolsheviks also made promises of 'workers' control' but by January 1920 this policy was abandoned. Lenin's idea of 'workers' control' was a system of "*a planned regulation of the economy*" whose main job was to "*inspect the financial and technical activities of an enterprise*" (decree, 27 Nov. 1917, see McCauley op cit, p233).

Like the later Soviet trade unions, workers were co-opted to increase productivity – not to give them any meaningful control over what they produced, the hours they worked, health and safety issues, etc.

The SPGB consistently exposed the Bolshevik charade for the fraud it was:

We have always contended that the Bolsheviks could only maintain power by resorting to capitalist devices. History has shown us to be correct. The January 1920 Congress of Executive Communists in Russia abolished the power of workers' control in factories and installed officials instructed by Moscow and given controlling influence. Their resolutions... show how economic backwardness has produced industrial conscription with heavy penalties for unpunctuality, etc. ... Russia has agreed to repay foreign property-owners their losses and allied Governments their "debts". This means continued exploitation of Russian workers to pay foreign exploiters. With all the enthusiasm of the Communists they find themselves faced with the actual conditions in Russia and the ignorance of the greater part of its population. There is no easier road to Socialism than the education of the workers in Socialism and their organisation to establish it by democratic means. Russia has yet to learn this.

The Super-Opportunists, August 1920, from RUSSIA SINCE 1917, p26

For decades many SOCIALIST STANDARD articles showed how clearly the SPGB saw through the Communist Party and Left-wing propaganda. There was that “senseless hero-worship” of Lenin as a ‘Great Man’ who it was claimed had alone “changed the course of history”. He was praised by his Western apologists for establishing the ‘Dictatorship of the Proletariat, yet what he had established was not this at all but the ‘Dictatorship of the Communist Party’: “by this he was able to keep power concentrated in his own hands

The Passing of Lenin, March 1924, from RUSSIA SINCE 1917, p34

By 1921 there was opposition: sailors at Kronstadt mutinied, demanding power for the Soviets, and in rural areas peasants rioted. Such revolts were crushed ruthlessly, and Trotsky led the attack on Kronstadt. With the catastrophic failure of so-called War Communism, when people resorted to barter, and cities starved while famine-hit peasants defended themselves from predatory bands of commissars trying to seize every last bit of grain they had, Lenin was forced to do a U-turn in 1921 and introduce NEP, the New Economic Policy. This allowed for private trading, along capitalist lines.

In assessing Lenin’s record, the SPGB noted:

Despite his claims at the beginning, he was the first to see the trend of conditions and adapt himself to these conditions. So far was he from “changing the course of history” as Brailsford ignorantly remarks, that it was the course of history which changed him, drove him from one point to another till to-day Russia stands halfway on the road to capitalism. The Communists, in their ignorance, may howl at this, but Russia cannot escape her destiny (ibid.).

From Lenin to Stalin

With the 1st Five-Year Plan (1929-33), Stalin forced the peasants into state farms and collective farms (*sovkhozy* and *kolkhozy*), with a ‘purge’ of so-called *kulaks*. The Plan demanded a huge increase in industrial production – new factories and cities were built, and an army of former peasants was conscripted to become industrial wage-slaves. There was a high price to pay – widespread famine.

Marx wrote of the ruthless way agricultural and industrial capital had been developed:

These methods depend in part on brute force, e.g. the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hothouse fashion, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.

CAPITAL VOL. 1, chapter XXXI

The key to this social transformation was the brutal expropriation of the peasants, so as to create a class of exploited

wage-slaves:

... these new freedmen became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production... and the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.

CAPITAL VOL.1, chapter XXV1

The Bolsheviks' achievement was to create a Russian working class, a proletariat, from the expropriated peasants. As in other countries before and since, this meant the ruthless use of state force and violence. And so the lie was launched – that this was 'Socialism'!

Socialists pointed out that this was actually a process of '*Primitive Accumulation of Capital*'.

But Moscow's paid apologists in Britain – the CPGB – argued tortuously that, under their advanced 'Marxist-Leninist' theory, what was happening in Russia was nothing of the sort.

Many decades later, with Gorbachev's policy of '*glasnost*' (openness), Moscow looked back at the 1920s period between NEP and the 1st Five-Year Plan, and admitted:

The extraordinary measures of 1928 grew into the policy of forced collectivisation and dekulakisation, that is the policy of balanced out industrial development was substituted with the policy of forced and unbalanced industrialisation... The Russian village had undergone a total transformation. The way of life had changed radically for most of the rural population.

Yevgeny Ambartsumov, NEP: A MODERN VIEW,
Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1988, pp 201, 203

At the time and for decades later, Western Leftwing apologists for state dictatorship as a necessary '*transition*' stage between capitalism and Socialism vigorously defended Stalin's purges and the Red Terror. "*You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs!*" was for them a clinching argument, excusing the worst excesses of Stalin's Terror.

The SPGB has always argued that Socialism is democratic or it is not Socialism. But the Left apologists insisted that the Soviet '*dictatorship of the proletariat*' was actually far more democratic than any capitalist state. Words were twisted to mean their opposite, and '*dialectics*' was said to justify this.

The CP insisted that Russia was a '*Socialist state*'. Socialists argued that it was nonsense to claim there was or could be '*Socialism in one country*', especially when official Soviet statistics existed, published in the West, detailing Russia's foreign and international trade. As cited in a SOCIALIST STANDARD article, *Russia: Land of High Profits* (September 1930), Soviet imports and exports were sizeable and growing, the National Debt was also large and growing, and interest rates also were high. Soviet Russia may have claimed to be 'Socialist' but it traded on world markets like any other capitalist state.

The Left CP-ers and fellow travellers argued that Soviet Russia could not be a capitalist country since there were no capitalists. To them, if there were no *individual* capitalists, no private owners of enterprises, this meant there was no capitalist class.

But this naive view completely ignored Marx's argument in WAGE-LABOUR AND CAPITAL:

Capital therefore pre-supposes wage-labour; wage-labour pre-supposes capital. They condition each other; each brings the other into existence.

To Marxists, it is obvious that, wherever workers are exploited for wages, this is a form of capitalism, just as with nationalised industries in the West. The class system is an economic relationship. The form of 'ownership' is not the issue: the point is that workers are unable to get a living except by being hired for wages or salaries. It is this that is the basis of class exploitation. For instance, it is possible and nowadays quite usual for capitalist enterprises to be collectively owned. The growth of companies into multinational, global, corporations and conglomerates is an

example of this, also the existence of hybrid businesses - partly private enterprise, partly state-owned.

But wherever workers must work for wages and salaries, hiring ourselves out to enrich others, this fact indicates the *class exploitation* of the worldwide capitalist system.

In the 1950s, there were actually some cases where lowly Russian bureaucrats set up illegally in business, posing as state enterprises but pocketing the profits. That was of course illegal and in some cases they were jailed. But it was the fact of exploitation of workers via the wages system which made this possible.

Quite legally it was then common for bureaucrats and managers of state enterprises to receive '*pakety*' - brown envelopes, stuffed with cash, in addition to their regular salary. It was also quite common for them to steal from the enterprise's 'social funds' (as later Robert Maxwell and Philip Green etc stole from their firms' pension funds). Theft too would not have been possible in a genuinely Socialist system, based on the common ownership and democratic control of the means of production.

The SPGB was challenging the current accepted ideas when in wartime we published a 1943 article IS RUSSIA SOCIALIST?

It is true that with the development of capitalism and in different countries the form of ownership and control of capital may differ. But the form of ownership of capital is not the vital question. It may be owned by the small private trader, the large owner, the trust, or by the state – "the executive committee of the capitalist class". But in all cases its existence proves the existence of capitalist society.

see RUSSIA SINCE 1917, 1948, p 85

Russia's Unemployed – Fact or Fiction?

Another naive claim made by the Left in the 1930-40s was that in 'Socialist' Russia there was no unemployment: Stalin had abolished it.

At that time workers in Britain and the USA were suffering from mass unemployment in the Great Depression, so the CP's claims that Soviet Russia had abolished unemployment sounded like a remarkable achievement.

But official Soviet statistics (1936) showed a huge rate of labour turnover:

The peasant-workers, bewildered by their new surroundings, often short of food and adequate lodging, rootless and unsettled, wandered about in search of better things.

Alec Nove, AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE SOVIET UNION, Penguin 1969, p197

The state may have denied the fact of unemployment but clearly there were workers who disappeared from work. In the West, they could claim some sort of dole money. Not so in Stalin's Russia. That period in Russia was one of immense working-class hardship: "*1933 was the culmination of the most precipitous peacetime decline in living standards known in recorded history*" (Nove, p207).

Even in the late 1970s, Soviet workers who objected to "*poor working conditions, low pay, high rates of injury at work, speed-up and increased productivity norms*" found themselves victimised, often homeless as well as blacklisted, joining "*the great army of Soviet unemployed, thrown outside the factory gates*" (*Open Letter*, 18 Sept. 1977, see WORKERS AGAINST THE GULAG, ed. Viktor Haynes and Olga Semyonova, Pluto Press 1979, p26). Workers trying to set up a Free Trade Union Association or appeal to the authorities in Moscow found their efforts led to KGB incarceration in psychiatric hospitals.

The FTUA's *Open Letters* appealing to the ILO, the UN, the TUC etc, were disregarded on the spurious grounds that the Soviet Union had its own 'official trade unions'. But there were no records showing support for workers' strikes and struggles from these 'official unions'. The real function of those 'official trade unions' was to be a tool of management, enforcing government and Party policy, especially about raising output. That practice did not end with

Stalin's death in 1953. In the 1960s, Shelepin, the then head of the trade unions, appointed by the government, was previously Chairman of the KGB (*ibid.*, p13).

British trade unions throughout the Soviet period, mostly dominated by CP leaders, routinely whitewashed what went on. For instance, Sir Walter Citrine, later TUC President, wrote during his wartime, third, visit to Russia:

The outstanding man in Russia today is undoubtedly Stalin. His power is immense. His authority unchallengeable, and the esteem in which he is held by the Russian people is only rivalled by the reverence that they feel for Lenin.
Sir Walter Citrine, IN RUSSIA NOW, 1942, p88

Fascism and 'Communism', Black Fascists and Red Fascists

The Left during the Thirties had opposed Hitler's Nazism, especially as Hitler saw 'communism' as his enemy, and sent trade unionists and communists to prison camps. But in August 1939, a sudden switch of policy decreed by Moscow meant the CPGB had to reverse its policy. It was now to oppose the war as an imperialist war.

Stalin's Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler meant the Comintern – which bankrolled all Communist parties in the west – had issued new instructions. But after Hitler attacked 'Socialist' Russia in 1941, suddenly this was again a war to defend democracy.

The SPGB found itself alone in its principled opposition to capitalist war, whatever the pretext, and we exposed the unprincipled twists and turns of the CP and other Soviet propagandists, as in this post-war pamphlet:

Again the unlucky Communists were thrown into consternation, but with blitheful spirits and brazen effrontery they hastened to proclaim that the war had changed its ideals overnight into a war against Fascism and they sternly admonished bewildered workers to step up the war effort and convert themselves into cannon fodder as quickly as possible.

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS, 1948, p42

This U-turn, which found the CP giving its full support to Churchill's wartime coalition government and condemning workers striking for better wages, led to a fall in CP membership and a serious loss of credibility, as expressed in this critical Branch Resolution (Communist Party 18th Congress, Nov. 1945):

That this Congress requests that a commission be set up to investigate the reasons for the recent loss in membership and loss of enthusiasm among members and to report on the reasons for any mistakes in policy which have contributed to this situation.

see BRITISH COMMUNISM - A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY
ed. John Callaghan and Ben Harker, Manchester University Press 2011, p161

After Stalin's death (1953), Khrushchev cautiously – in a 'secret speech', to a closed session of the CPSU's Congress – denounced Stalin's '*cult of the individual*' with so many Party members wrongly attacked and purged. Sadly, he made no reference to Stalin's and the Party's crimes against the workers and peasants, and limited his examples to just the 1936-38 period. The full text was not published in Russia till 1988 [www.rferl.org].

In the 1950s with the Thaw in Russia, and visits from the West permitted, the CPSU was no longer all-powerful. Russians started to copy and circulate their writings in *samizdat*, unofficially, and dissidents became more active. Western-style fashions and pop music became popular, even in Soviet Russia. In Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia there were risings against Soviet authoritarianism – risings brutally repressed.

The Kremlin made efforts to modernise agriculture and motivate collective farmers but in vain. Crops repeatedly failed and huge imports of US grain were needed to stave off famine. Khrushchev's confident prediction that in just a few years Russia would move on from Socialism to Communism was simply disregarded; although that was adopted as official Party policy, later Party spokesmen shrugged this off as fatuous.

After some decades of stagnation under a series of elderly Party secretaries, from Brezhnev to Andropov and his successors, Gorbachev emerged and started policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Media openness and economic and social reform were the order of the day. Yet it was still a one-party state, and Gorbachev still defended the CPSU's monopoly of power.

With his successor, Yeltsin, there came more political and economic changes. One-party rule ended. Huge state enterprises were auctioned off – apparently for all to have a share in. In fact, these quickly became the property of a minority of unscrupulous wheeler-dealers, often using gangs of thugs to force the surrender of property.

This was now a system of private enterprise, based on systematic and blatant corruption. And Yeltsin and his family were up to their necks in this corruption. When he resigned, he handed power to Putin, on conditions that meant full immunity from prosecution both for Yeltsin and for Putin. And Putin has made full use of this. He and his cronies have been responsible for the murders of many critics and opponents (Anna Politkovskaya, Litvinenko, Magnitsky, Nemtsov etc.). The suppression of most independent media outlets and total control of TV, and the murders of a good many fine journalists, mean that Russia today has only a veneer of openness.

The reality is that this is still a brutal dictatorship, only play-acting at 'democracy'. There is talk of restoring statues of Stalin. The Russian Orthodox Church is building churches all over the place, with Putin's full backing. With Orthodoxy there is growing intolerance and hostility to any gay or liberated lifestyles. The Orthodox Church is as reactionary, patriarchal and hidebound as American Bible Belt evangelism and the last Tsar is now venerated as a martyr. Greater Russian nationalism is the state ideology, justifying the racist treatment as second-class citizens of any ethnic minorities, and it also encourages militarism, e.g. wars in Georgia and the Caucasus, and the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

The Legacy of the 1917 Revolution

On the negative side, the Russian Revolution and its aftermath has led to more than a horrific loss of lives in Russia. It has led to the tragic misunderstandings which mean that, for most people, the mere mention of Marxism leads to horrified ideas of Orwell's totalitarian "1984". Socialism is still equated with state capitalism and one-party dictatorship. The 'collapse of Communism' is explained as due to the inefficiency of the Soviet economic system.

And, for those on the Left, there is still a mistaken belief that in order to achieve Communism you first have to establish 'Socialism' as a necessary 'transition stage' between capitalism and 'Communism'.

It also led to generations of trade unionists and the Labour Party finding their organisations taken over and made use of by devious, unscrupulous, Left-wing 'entryists'. This Bolshevik policy weakened the British unions, and made many workers feel distrustful.

As this article has shown, early on Socialists argued that in backward Russia the 1917 revolution could not bring Socialism. We clearly argued that, wherever workers must work for wages, this is indicative of the capitalist system.

We also exposed the naive notion that a 'Great Man' with an elitist 'vanguard' party is needed to lead the 'ignorant masses'. And we have many times refuted Lenin's claim to have established a '*dictatorship of the proletariat*', and Stalin's claim that in Russia there was '*Socialism in one country*'. Unlike the CPGB, we never fell for the World War 11 rhetoric about a "war to defend democracy" – something which led the CP to support conscription and even oppose strikes!

Above all, we strongly opposed the CPGB, with its bogus claims that in Soviet Russia's one-party state, with its secret police, its cruel and ruthless purges, its prison camps and its censorship, we should see a purer, better form of 'democracy'. Likewise we opposed its specious argument that, where there are no individual capitalists, there could be no class struggle.

Finally, as we wrote in 1920: "*There is no easier road to Socialism than the education of the workers in Socialism, and their organisation to establish it by democratic means*". Readers, take note!

FROM OUR ARCHIVES THE TURMOIL IN RUSSIA – WHERE WE STAND, AUGUST 1991

Russia, the so-called Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, is in turmoil. Its Empire is breaking-up as several of the constituent republics seek independence. Failing to retain the backing of united armed forces, the leaders of the Russian Communist Party are losing their dictatorial grip on power, and spokesmen of other political groups struggle for leadership in the new democratically elected “*Parliament*”.

The upsurge of revolt against the old leaders had been largely the outcome of gross inefficiency of transport and industry under the Russian system of nationalisation. It has nothing to do with Socialism. Nationalisation in Russia, as in Britain, is state capitalism. The economic backwardness of Russia is the backwardness of Russian state capitalism, in comparison with the capitalism of Western Europe, the U.S.A., Japan and so on. So the new rulers of Russia declare their intention of copying more or less closely the Western pattern of “*private enterprise capitalism*” with relatively little nationalisation, as in British industry following the privatisation measures of the Thatcher government.

The version given to us by British politicians and the media is that it is the failure of “*Communism*”; the monumental falsehood that there has been a Communist social system in Russia for the past three-quarters of a century since Lenin and his followers, backed by armed force, seized power in 1917.

The basic essential of capitalism is the ownership of the means of production and distribution by the capitalist class (or by the government on their behalf), wealth being produced by the non-owning working class. Backed by state power the capitalists, though themselves non-producers of wealth, are able to extract, in the form of profit, interest and rent of land, part of what is produced by the wage and salary earners. Capitalism is a commodity producing system; that is to say all the goods produced are sold in the market. The worker’s labour-power also takes on the form of a commodity, wages being the price of labour-power.

In Socialist society (for the Socialist Party of Great Britain, Communism and Socialism are the same) there will be no owning class and working class; no rent, interest and profit; and no wages or salaries. Goods will be produced not for sale but solely and directly for consumption.

As it was put by Marx and Engels in the COMMUNIST MANIFESTO (1848), it involves “*the abolition of buying and selling*”. No one can seriously claim that this has been the system in Russia. It remains to state the attitude of the Socialist Party of Great Britain to past and present happenings in Russia. We have nothing to withdraw or apologise for. We did not at the beginning suppose that it was possible for that semi-feudal country, with its largely peasant population, to be ready for Socialism. An article – *The Revolution in Russia – Where It Fails*, published in The SOCIALIST STANDARD in August 1918, contained this statement:

What justification is there, then, for terming the upheaval in Russia a Socialist revolution? None whatever beyond the fact that the leaders in the November movement claim to be Marxian Socialists.

We showed also that they had no backing in the writings of Marx for their claims. Over the years we consistently disputed their claim to be able by means of dictatorship, repression and censorship to impose Socialism on a population overwhelmingly opposed to it.

What of the future? Assuming that Russia goes over to a “*democratic*” political system similar to that of the Western countries; does this entail the ending of the class struggle between capitalists and workers? By no means. The class struggle will continue as it has in the rest of the “*democratic*” world. Whatever may be the political complexion of governments elected in Russia they will invariably come into conflict with the working class. Capitalism cannot be run in any other way than by resisting the efforts of the workers to raise their wages at the expense of profits. Nor

can governments prevent periodic depressions with high unemployment.

We, therefore, do not congratulate the Russian workers on their new found enthusiasm for “*democratic*” capitalist political parties. What are urgently needed, in Russia as in Britain and in every other country in the world, are Socialist political parties having the replacement of capitalism by Socialism as their sole objective. In July 1917, the SOCIALIST STANDARD contained this declaration:-

We of the Socialist Party of Great Britain make it plain that we are not prepared to congratulate the Russian peasant upon assisting the Russian capitalist class to a more complete dominance.

Now that the peasants have largely become factory workers, we call on them to form Socialist parties. We are not prepared to congratulate them on supporting the political parties aiming to modernize Russian capitalism.

[Back to top](#)

Object and Declaration of Principles

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN HOLDS:

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (ie land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle, between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind without distinction of race or sex.
5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organise consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class

emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

[Back to top](#)

email: enquiries@socialiststudies.org.uk | www.socialiststudies.org.uk